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SUBJECT: NORWEGIAN DEFENSE MINISTRY ON NATO, RUSSIA,
AFGHANISTAN, AND NORDIC COOPERATION

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires James T. Heg for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: MoD Security Policy Director Svein Efjestad told EUR/NB Director, DCM, PolCouns, A/DATT and PolMil Officer November 12 that the recent NATO-Russia Council meeting held in Oslo on nuclear policy was a useful discussion, particularly as it addressed sub-strategic weapons, which remain a top concern for Norway. He noted that Nordic Cooperation continues to evolve, citing the recent agreement on structural organization, the ease with which Swedish and Norwegian pilots cross borders, and logistic and supply coordination in Afghanistan that permits an increased "sharp end" focus. He said that Norway maintains a close relationship with the Baltics, in particular Latvia, which has soldiers in Norway's Afghanistan PRT. He repeated Norway's ongoing concern on keeping NATO relevant to the home audience, particularly in light of Russia's recent exercises and the minimal Nordic deterrent capability. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Efjestad began the discussion by summarizing the NATO-Russia Council seminar on nuclear doctrine and strategy, held 8 - 10 November in Oslo. He said the discussion was useful from Norway's perspective, as Norway addressed the need for a follow-on to the START negotiations to reduce the number of sub-strategic weapons. One of Norway's highest priorities is for Russian sub-strategic weapons to be part of an arms control and verification regime, he said, as Norway views Russia's maritime and tactical weapons as a significant destabilizing force. Norway would like them "out of the area," he emphasized, given the lower threshold for using sub-strategic nuclear weapons.

Nordic Cooperation Update

¶3. (C) Efjestad gave an update on Nordic Cooperation, noting that he accompanied the Minister of Defense to a recent Nordics meeting, where the participants agreed on a structural framework for Nordic Cooperation. He added that the Nordics are also actively working to create synergies in Afghanistan, by using a common logistics hub, to allow increased deployment on the "sharp end" and reducing logistical and supply costs. Back on the home front Efjestad said that the Nordics have a promising project to jointly develop new artillery, as well as conduct training and exercises. Swedish and Norwegian air forces now routinely cross borders with minimal restrictions, he explained, which provides significant operational benefits. Finally, Cold Response, Norway's largest military exercise, will partially take place on Swedish soil.

Afghanistan

¶4. (C) In terms of Nordic Cooperation, Efjestad noted that veterans affairs issues increasingly are coming into focus, as all Scandinavian countries have some elements deployed in Afghanistan and believe they can work together to ensure returning veterans receive the best possible care. Norway

also has a close relationship with the Baltics: currently 140 Latvian soldiers are serving as part of Norway's PRT in Afghanistan. Latvia has asked Norway to determine how they can best maintain their commitments, given the current financial crisis in the country. Norway is reviewing options to provide assistance, Efjestad said.

15. (C) Efjestad said that Norway is looking forward to the US decision in a few weeks on which direction to take in Afghanistan, and that it would likely be a topic of conversation during President Obama's December visit to Norway. He said Norway is doing its best militarily to support the ISAF mission, and remains committed on the civilian side, with 750 million NOK per year (approximately USD 130 million). However, he added, rampant corruption is a significant concern for Norway, and Efjestad referred to the government's responsibility to Norwegian tax-payers in spending funds wisely. Efjestad outlined the difficulties in deploying a Norwegian Police Mentoring Team (lack of capacity and numbers of Norwegian civilian police) and an additional Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT) (the Afghan Army decided not to deploy an additional brigade in the North, to which the OMLT would have been attached.)

Bringing NATO Home

16. (C) Efjestad raised his oft-repeated concern that NATO needs to remain relevant to the domestic audience, and lobbied for increased NATO visibility for Norwegians. He worried that NATO lacks a regional headquarters responsible for the Nordic or Baltic regions, which raises doubts among

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Norwegians about NATO's ability to defend Norway and its coastline in case of an attack. Given the significant troop deployment in Afghanistan, he said, Norway is stretched thin, and lacks the capacity to serve as a deterrent or protect itself from attack. For all the benefits brought along by Nordic Cooperation, he added, it lacks an Article 5 commitment, and does not obligate Finland and Sweden to come to Norway's aid if attacked.

17. (C) Silberstein warned that the Baltics' continually raising doubts about NATO's commitment and capacity to meet its Article 5 obligation unintentionally leads to questioning about NATO's role. He added that contingency planning only goes so far if political will and capabilities are lacking, so the key is to focus on those issues. Efjestad countered by noting that ensuring that NATO capabilities are sufficient goes to the heart of the current Strategic Concept exercise, and that there should be at least the generic planning for NATO to engage in the Baltic area, otherwise NATO's commitment would be viewed as lacking in credibility and seen as an "empty shell." Planning demonstrates the political commitment outlined in the Washington Treaty and would give a robustness to Article 5, he concluded.

Russian Exercises in High North reminiscent of Cold War

18. (C) Efjestad noted that Sweden and Finland remained pre-occupied with the Baltic area, and said that Norway has much more cooperation with the United States in the Arctic, as the Swedes and Finns lack any coastline or air and sea capacity in that area. However, he added, they do engage in the Arctic on economic and climate concerns. Nordic military capability remains very limited, and will never serve as a deterrent, which is why, he said, the Finns would like to join NATO. Efjestad also noted that during the recent Russian Ladoga 2009 exercise, which coincided with the Zapad exercise, the Russians deployed their Siberian brigade in the high north, and deployed forces at sea in a Cold War-esque manner. According to Efjestad, the political message sent was that Russia's threshold for engagement is low along its immediate borders, and that military and security issues

remain the main focus for the Russian government. Their exercise of strategic nuclear capability in the Barents Sea was particularly noteworthy on that front, he said.

19. (C) Comment: Efjestad faithfully delivered Norway's consistent message regarding NATO: ensure the new Strategic Concept includes a focus on protecting the home front. Nordic Cooperation remains secondary to NATO, but is serving a vital role in providing cost-sharing opportunities in a tight defense budget climate. An indirect benefit of Nordic Cooperation may be to further Sweden and Finland down the path to NATO membership, as they become more integrated with Norwegian forces. End Comment.
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